



**EFFECTIVENESS OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION ON SIMPLE WORD
READING OF THAI ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
FIRST GRADERS**

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**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
MAJOR IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS
UBON RATCHATHANI UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2014
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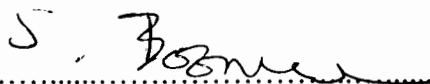
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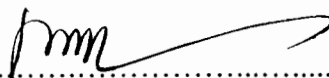
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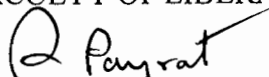


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all of those people who have helped to make the completion of my independent study possible, especially Dr. Sirintip Boonmee, for her extreme kindness and patience during this long period of completing this study. I would also like to thank the committee members, Dr. Saisunee Chaimongkol, Dr. Jiraporn Smyth, and Dr. Wachiraporn Kijpoonphol, for all of their support and suggestions. I thank all my professors who have instilled valuable knowledge in me throughout my graduate study at Ubon Ratchatani Universty.

I wish to thank my parents and all my family members for believing in me, supporting me with the power of trust and love, and waiting to see my success. Those things I have received from my beloved ones pushed me into the today success.

I also would like to thank all my beloved friends and students that helped me and waited to see my today success.

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บทคัดย่อ

- เรื่อง : ประสิทธิภาพของการสอนโฟนิกส์ในการอ่านคำพื้นฐานภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียน
ชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 1 ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ
- ผู้วิจัย : จิรวัดน์ ศรีสวัสดิ์
- ชื่อปริญญา : ศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต
- สาขาวิชา : การสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ
- อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา : ดร.สิรินทร์ทิพย์ บุญมี
- คำสำคัญ : การสอนแบบโฟนิกส์, การอ่านคำพื้นฐานภาษาอังกฤษ,
นักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 1

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อเปรียบเทียบความสามารถการอ่านคำพื้นฐานภาษาอังกฤษ ก่อนและหลังการเรียนการอ่านแบบโฟนิกส์และเพื่อค้นหาว่าตัวอักษรใดบ้างที่นักเรียนมีปัญหาการในการออกเสียง กลุ่มประชากรงานวิจัยนี้คือนักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 1 จำนวน 7 คน ที่เรียนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐานที่โรงเรียนบ้านฮ่องเช่า อำเภอราชสีห์ จังหวัดศรีสะเกษ ประเทศไทย นักเรียนทั้ง 7 คนกำลังศึกษาอยู่ในภาคเรียนที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2557 เครื่องมือการศึกษาครั้งนี้คือแผนการสอน 7 ชั่วโมง เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูลคือแบบทดสอบก่อนและหลังเรียนที่เป็นชุดเดียวกันที่รวมคำภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐานในรูปแบบ พยัญชนะต้น-สระ-ตัวสะกด รวมทั้งหมด 25 คำ และตารางจำแนกตัวอักษรที่นักเรียนออกเสียงผิดและที่นักเรียนไม่ออกเสียงเพื่อหาตัวอักษรที่มีปัญหาในการออกเสียงของนักเรียน

ผลการศึกษาที่ได้ในครั้งนี้มีดังนี้คือ การเรียนการอ่านแบบโฟนิกส์ดูเหมือนจะช่วยพัฒนาการอ่านคำภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐานของนักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 1 และนักเรียนมีปัญหาการออกเสียงตัวอักษรกลุ่มพยัญชนะมากกว่าตัวอักษรกลุ่มสระ

ABSTRACT

TITLE : EFFECTIVENESS OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION ON SIMPLE
WORD READING OF THAI ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN
L LANGUAGE FIRST GRADERS

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DEGREE : MASTER OF ARTS

MAJOR : TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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KEYWORDS : PHONICS INSTRUCTION, SIMPLE ENGLISH WORD
READING, FIRST GRADERS

The purposes of this study were to compare the results of simple English words reading before and after learning through phonics instruction and to investigate whether there were problematic letters for the learners to pronounce. The participants were seven Thai EFL first graders (Pratom Sueksa 1 students) studying Fundamental English Course at Ban Hong-Kah School, Rasisalai District, Sisaket Province, Thailand. They were in the second semester of the academic year 2014. The experimental instruments were 7 lesson plans of one-hour learning period each. The data collecting instruments were the comparative pre-test and post-test made up of two word reading lists containing 25 CVC words. The scoring tables were also used to distinguish the problematic letters for the learners to pronounce.

The findings of this study were that phonics instruction seemed to help promote simple English word reading of the students and that consonant letters seemed to be more problematic than vowel letters.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The chapter describes the rationale, objectives, research questions, hypotheses, significance, scope, and definitions of key terms of the study.

1.1 Rationale

Letter sounds are the smallest unit of a language, and recognition of them helps word reading ability. Gerald & Garvey (2010) claimed that sound is the principal, earliest, and most fundamental mode of a language. Learners experience difficulties when reading if they have little or no knowledge of letter sounds. Learning to decode letter sounds leads young learners of reading to the life-long skill (Nunan, 2006). Also, Adam & Pressley et al. (1994), cited in Morrow et al. (1997) mentioned that letter-sound relationship is critical for the success of reading development. Letter sound knowledge is a fundamental requirement in teaching beginners to read. Adams (1998), cited in Kajornboon (2010) mentioned that phonics instruction improves reading skill by creating the awareness of recognizing the letter sounds and blending pattern.

In general, each English letter has a unique letter sound. To read a simple word (i.e., a combination of an initial consonant letter, a single vowel letter, and a final consonant letter), each letter sound must be recognized to blend all the sounds into a syllable or word. Before a child learns how to decode the letters, he or she must understand that different symbols represent different sounds (Nunan, 2006). Hence, learners of reading must recognize letter sounds to be able to read seen and unseen (new) words effectively.

Based on the researcher's experience, Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) beginners experience simple English word (CVC word form) reading difficulty when they read their English textbooks. Even though most words are in the simple CVC word form, the learners still experience word reading difficulty. Their lack of letter sound awareness possibly causes word reading failure. Learners are able to read words

by remembering them as sight words. They read without recognizing the sounds of the letters that constitute the CVC word form. Consequently, when unseen words are encountered, they cannot read them. One example experienced by the researcher is the reading of the word "MAT". After the word was presented to the young learners using a picture card as a reading clue with the spelling repetition drill of all letters contained in the word (Em - Aey - Tee), and the word meaning explanation given by the instructor, the learners were able to read the taught word successfully. On the other hand, when the unseen word "FAT" was presented, the students could not read the word. This reading failure may be caused by lack of exposure to the word and of letter sound knowledge. Using the spelling method or remembering the word by sight allows learners to be able to read seen words (words that learners experienced previously) only, but learners are unlikely to be able to read unseen words (first experienced words). Therefore, the creation of phonemic awareness in learners may promote the development of the fundamental reading skill of decoding both seen and unseen words.

The development of letter sound knowledge occurs through the use of different teaching methods. Research recognized the importance of letter sound awareness many years ago, but there is continued discussion about what is the most appropriate method to promote the letter sound knowledge.

The National Institute of Child Health and Development, U.S.A. (as cited in Wyse & Goswami, 2008) stated that word decoding capability is a requirement of early reading instruction. Therefore, investigation of the appropriate teaching method to enhance reading proficiency of reading beginners is a fundamental requirement of the language classroom teacher. This empirical study aims to investigate whether phonics instruction, the instruction of English letter sounds, is effective and can improve simple English word reading of Thai EFL 1st graders who have never been exposed to this instruction previously.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study were to find out the effectiveness of phonics instruction on simple English word reading by Thai EFL 1st graders and to find out whether there were any letters studied that were problematic for the learners.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions of this study were:

1.3.1 Does phonics instruction help promote the reading of simple English words by Thai EFL 1st graders?

1.3.2 Are there letters that are problematic for the learners?

1.4 Hypotheses

It has been hypothesized that:

1.4.1 Phonics instruction helps Thai EFL 1st graders read simple English words by enabling them to recognize letter sounds and blend the letter sounds into words.

1.4.2 The learners can learn to pronounce all letters focused in this study equally well.

1.5 Significance

It was anticipated that the results of this study would assist EFL teachers to decide about the appropriateness of phonics instruction in teaching reading of simple English words to Thai EFL beginners.

1.6 Scope

The participants of the study were 7 Thai EFL 1st graders in the second semester of academic year 2014. All participants had experienced simple English word (CVC) reading difficulty. The study focused on five short vowel letter sounds; a /æ/, e /ɛ/, i /ɪ/, o /ɔ/, and u /ʌ/ and 5 consonant letter sounds; p /p/, t /t/, k /k/, m /m/, and n /n/ in English, which are similar to Thai sounds and can occur in the Thai CVC structure. The selected consonants can occur both in onset and coda positions in Thai. And only reading, not spelling was investigated in this study.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

1.7.1 Phonics Instruction

Phonics instruction is the teaching of consonant and vowel letter sounds to promote students' reading ability (to be elaborated in chapter 2).

1.7.2 Simple Word Reading

Simple word reading is the ability to pronounce and blend three letters sounds into words. Each word contains one initial single consonant, followed by one single vowel, and ended with one consonant (CVC).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes word reading and its importance, phonics instruction including history, and types, as well as other related studies.

2.1 Word Reading and Its Importance

Word reading skill is decoding and blending a combination of letter sounds into syllables or words. Word reading skill is the basis of gaining more knowledge of other learning fields.

Ladefoged (1982), cited in Fromkin et al. (2003), mentioned that the knowledge of letter sound leads the students to the success of reading. To read the word is very simple for a reader who has the knowledge of letter sounds because he or she recognizes the letter sounds and can blend them into a word. In reading, the speaker would work with the word from left-to-right and segment the letter sounds before blending them into a word (Reed, 2012). The speaker of English knows that there are three letter sounds that make up the word “cat”. The initial sound is represented with the letter “c” that represents the consonant letter sound /k/, the second letter is “a” that represents the vowel sound /æ/, and the final letter is “t” that represents the consonant sound /t/.

Moreover, word reading is a basic skill in learning all subjects as students can read and gain more information or knowledge. High levels of achievement in all subject areas can be related to reading ability. Children’s ability to decode unknown words is needed as it is the foundation of academic success in all areas, U.S. Department of Education (2002) cited in Cynthia (2010). Reading skills do support learners’ learning of other subject fields. Without the reading skill, students can hardly extend or gain more knowledge of learning in their future academic lives.

2.2 Phonics Instruction

To succeed in learning how to read letters is a fundamental requirement. Knowing the letter sounds is not automatic, so letter sound instruction is needed. One instructional technique to develop letter sound knowledge is called phonics instruction. The instruction is to introduce the letter sounds to the beginners of reading. Golf (1998) cited in Kajornboon (2010) pointed out that phonics instruction is the teaching of systematic letter sound system that helps students to manipulate the letter and letter sounds to support their word reading. According to Beard (2000), teaching phonics means to encourage children to be able to identify sounds in spoken words (phonological awareness, recognize common spelling for each phoneme (phoneme-grapheme correspondence), blend phonemes into words for reading, and segment words into phonemes for spelling.

Phonics instruction has been included in reading classes for centuries (International Reading Strategy, 2006). Phonics instruction allows learners of reading to recognize letter sounds. According to White (2005), the skill includes the study of letter sounds, letter sound merging, common spelling patterns, initial consonants, digraphs (2 consonants that represent a sound). Chall (1967) cited in Fredrick (2008) stated that phonics instruction was effective in helping children to become skilled readers. Kajornboon (2010) pointed out that phonics instruction can improve students' pronunciation because they can segment the sounds and produce them correctly.

2.2.1 History of Phonics

Phonics or the learning of letter sounds has played a major role in the field of language learning for many years. According to National Reading Panel (NRP) (2006), the phonics teaching was introduced in the 1600s and the teaching was first used in reading instruction in the Americas in the 1790s through the inclusion of phonetically organized word lists in Noah Webster's and it is now famous as the "Blue Back Speller". The "Blue Back Speller" supplemented alphabetic methods of early reading that involved children in learning names of letter and the spelling of syllables, and then memorization of the content. Therefore, the letter sound knowledge has been noticed for its importance for decades and the teaching of letter sounds is still useful for teachers to apply it into their reading classes to improve word reading skill of the learners. National Reading Panel (2006) stated that nature, extent, and role of phonics

instruction in beginning reading programs have been debatable in public education for over three hundred years.

2.2.2 Types of Phonics Instruction

According to National Literacy Strategy NLS (2000), there are two different methods of phonics instruction: systematic and non-systematic. Morrow and Tracy (1997), however, mentioned that phonics instruction can be presented in three different teaching forms: explicit instruction (systematic phonics instruction), contextual instruction (non-systematic phonics instruction), and the combined approach.

In systematic phonics instruction, each letter sound and sound blending are taught directly and systematically. Both letter sound knowledge and the letter sound blending are explicitly presented to the learners. Frequently, worksheets are very useful for skill evaluation of this instructional strategy. Australian Government, Department of Education Science and Training (2005) cited in Wyse et al. (2008) suggested that systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction is important to teach reading.

In non-systematic phonics instruction, students recognize letter sounds while reading words and stories or contexts. By this, readers may require previous knowledge of letters and letter sounds learned previously to explore the reading of new words. Contextual phonics instruction and the combined phonics teaching method are included as parts of non-systematic phonics instruction. Contextual phonics instruction (Non-systematic Phonics Instruction) is the use of meaningful and functional contexts that may include everyday activities, language experience charts, and story-telling books. The teacher and learners process the phonics or letter sounds within the learning contexts they are exposed to through classroom discussion of a target word.

For combined phonics teaching method is a combination of the explicit and contextual approach. An example of this is when the teacher reads about animals that start with *P*, like pig or puppy, and provide worksheets focusing on the correct phonetic (letter-sound) group. By this, the teacher provides a context for the reading, then takes the letter sound out of the context, and finally teaches the sound explicitly (Beard, 2000).

Some reading class instructors prefer isolated phonics teaching where phonics is taught systematically, while others prefer to do it contextually through reading contexts as in non-systematic phonics teaching. Cynthia (2010) suggested that children learn word reading effectively by sight and examine them in isolation and in different contexts. However, Ehri et al. (2001) suggested that systematic phonics instruction helps children learn to read more effectively than non-systematic phonics instruction. Both teachings of systematic and non-systematic phonics instruction are more effective when combined with interesting and fun teaching material and activities. National Literacy Strategy NLS (2000) suggested that phonics can and should be taught in appropriate and motivating ways that are enjoyable. Children will learn more effectively when appropriate and motivating activities are included. Cunningham et al. (1998) stated that children at different levels can learn using multi-faceted and multi-level activities (single activity but rich in learning in which better level learners can learn and lower level learners can enjoy).

2.3 Related Studies

Phonics instruction has been a discussed topic for decades. There were previous studies conducted to evaluate the benefits of phonics instruction. Fredrick (2008) mentioned that some educators agree that phonics instruction helps learning reading, while others do not. Some previous studies support the use of systematic phonics instruction, while others claimed that the phonics instruction did not help the learning of reading class compared to the teaching of reading using whole language approach.

Dahl et al. (1999) conducted a study titled "Phonics Instruction and Students Achievement in Whole Language First-grade Classrooms" and supported the effectiveness of phonics instruction. The study was to investigate 722 observations from 6 classrooms to find out whether phonics or letter sound teaching was effective in a language class. The study focused on phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonemic segmentation. By this, the teaching of vowel and consonant sound decoding and encoding were addressed through classroom explanations and fun teaching activities and self-selected materials. Participants were also evaluated for the three phonics skills and resulted better for the post-test than the pre-test and reached a higher score of DSA (Developing-mental Spelling Analysis), HRSW (Hearing and

Recording Sound; Word Correctly Identified), and QRI-III Word List (Qualitative Reading Inventory). The participants gained more knowledge of reading. The score probably was the effect of providing phonics instruction in learning and teaching.

Sturt (1999) also conducted a study that supported the effectiveness of phonics instruction. His study was titled "Early Phoneme Awareness and Phonic Teaching Improve Reading and Spelling in Inner-city Second Language Learners". It investigated the use of phonics instruction with SLA students (Second Language Acquisition) using the programs of Jolly Phonics (JP) for one group and the holistic approach of Big Book for the other group. The study supported the use of phonics instruction and found that the JP group performed better in the skill of phoneme awareness in four tests of pre-test, post-test, delayed post-test, and phonics knowledge. In the writing test, there was no difference shown on the pre-test, but the JP group made more progress during the intervention and also the post-test. This indicated the effectiveness of phonic teaching program of Jolly Phonics. Moreover, JP group performed better in the delayed post-test.

Saising (2003) studied "Integration of Phonics and Whole Language Approaches to Promote English Oral Reading Ability, Reading Comprehension, Spelling, and Opinion about English Reading of Pratom Suksa 4 Students" to compare the study results of English oral reading ability, reading comprehension and spelling before and after employing integration of phonics and whole language approaches and also to study the students' opinion about using two approaches. The participants were 15 Pratom Suksa 4 students at Wat Suan Dok School, Muang District, Chiangmai Province, Thailand. The study used a word-level reading test to evaluate reading skill, a word-level spelling test to evaluate spelling skill, a lyrics and poem reading test to know the students comprehension, and also a questionnaire to see the students' opinion of using both instructions. Study found that the students' spelling, word reading, and reading comprehension skills improved after using both instructions. For the questionnaire, students agreed with the instructions and like English reading more after the instructions. The study suggested that interesting learning topics should be self-selected based on the students' interest before the instruction to build motivation and the introduction to phonics instructions is needed before for better understanding. Creative materials and learning environment that support the instruction should be

used and set to help the students' memorization.

Mekwong (2004) studied "Development of English Pronunciation Ability and Vocabulary Retention through the Phonics Methods" with 20 Pratom Suksa 3 students (Thai EFL) at Ban Romluang, Sunsai District, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand to see the effectiveness of phonics method that affects learners' English pronunciation and vocabulary retention. The study used 5 lesson plans. Each lesson plan contained 4 one-hour teaching periods. The data were collected when finishing each lesson plan using the word pronunciation and matching item to test vocabulary knowledge to find the percentage of passing the test (at least 50%). The delayed vocabulary test was also provided 14 days after finishing the instruction 14 days to see the vocabulary retention. The study showed that all of the 20 participants could pass of the pronunciation test and vocabulary tests at least 50% after the phonics instruction and also for the delayed posttest. The study concluded that phonics method helped students' pronunciation and students' vocabulary retention skills. The study also claimed that to guide the students to English letter and vowel sounds, one or two periods before phonics instruction could facilitate the phonics instruction and the teaching. Moreover, interesting teaching materials such as clear and various of pictures, storytelling and songs should be included to create learning motivation.

Sinsup (2009) investigated the use of phonics instruction in the study of Using "Phonics to Enhance Mathayom Sueksal (7th graders of Ban Nonkhawittayakom School, Nonkhon, Sisaket, Thailand) Students' Reading and Spelling Skills as well as Motivation". The study found that Mattayom Sueksal (7th graders) students, aged 12-14, presented significantly higher scores of the post-test of reading and spelling when there was the application of phonics instruction. Moreover, for the measurement of motivated questionnaire, all students rated all 8 statements as "strongly agreed" or "Agreed". They positively rated all statements in the motivation measure because they liked the instruction and found that the instruction was more active than word spelling method or memorization. Moreover, the students appreciated the use of flashcards, CDs, and chants. The study concluded that phonics instruction was beneficial in the reading class and also created more motivation to learn reading. The study recommended that phonics instruction can be used as the only method or combined with other methods to teach reading and spelling. And with primary students, phonics

with other methods to teach reading and spelling. And with primary students, phonics instruction should be taught with a longer learning duration, using phonics teaching materials to help the learners to be more familiar with the letter sounds taught.

Kajornboon (2010) conducted the study "Using Phonics Method to Promote English Pronunciation and Vocabulary Knowledge of MathayomSuksa 1 Students" to compare students' English pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge before and after learning through phonics method. Fifteen students at Prince Royal's school, Muang District, Chiang Mai Province participated in this 18 fifty-minute periods study using the pronunciation and vocabulary test for data collection. The tests were the reading test containing 12 sentences to evaluate the students' pronunciation skill and thirty items of multiple choice vocabulary tests to evaluate the students' vocabulary skill after phonics instruction was employed. The result showed that the students could reach the higher score of post-test compared to pre-test with the percentage of pre - and post-test were 52.33 / 76.66 for the test of pronunciation and 70.90 / 80.43 for the test of vocabulary knowledge. Phonics instruction improved students' pronunciation because the students recognized, segmented and blended the letter sounds into words correctly. Students had more chance to practice more vocabulary by reading words repeatedly and also be exposed to the meaning of words that their vocabulary knowledge could be improved. However, the background knowledge of phonics should be reviewed before learning and teaching to associate their previous knowledge with the new knowledge encountered. In pronunciation, Students needed to be taught with easy simple words repeatedly for their better understanding and confidence before starting reading phrases and sentences.

Cynthia (2010) conducted research titled "Saxon Phonics Versus Whole-Language Reading Instruction in First Grade Classrooms, Gender, and Beginning-and End-of-Year DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) Scores" to examine the impact of the two reading instruction methods on students of different genders and ability levels. The 180 participants of the study were from two different first grade classrooms of two different schools (Title I Schools) in rural Middle Tennessee, The United States of America. The results were there was no significant difference of the PSF (Phoneme Segmentation Fluency), NWF (Non-Sense Words Reading Fluency), and ORF (Oral Reading Fluency) scores for the end of the years test and there was

also no significant difference in ability regarding gender of the subjects and methods. The study showed that there was no different impact of phonics instruction versus whole-language instruction, since there was no significant differences made either in reading achievement scores, nor when gender was related.

The results of the first 6 studies mentioned above supported the use of phonics instruction to develop learning of reading. The reading skill of the learners improved after the instruction of phonics was employed. However, the result of the last study mentioned above seemed not to support the phonics instruction as it was reported that the phonics instruction was not superior to whole-language instruction when using two treatments of Saxon Phonics Program and Whole-Language teaching. The supporting studies mentioned previously were conducted with both learners in ESL and EFL contexts. By this, it is interesting to investigate if this instrument would be useful for 1st grade students at Ban Hong-Kha School, Rasisalai, Sisaket, Thailand who were EFL beginners with no English background knowledge (except the 26 letter names) and had never faced the phonics instruction previously. It is worthy to conduct this study to investigate the effectiveness of phonics instruction on simple English word reading using the systematic phonics instruction that should be appropriate to be used with the young EFL beginners because students' background knowledge is not needed. Systematic phonics instruction directly presents the letter sound knowledge explicitly and has been used widely over a long period of time with positive results. It has been proved by a variety of systematic phonics programs used with children of different ages and abilities (National Reading Panel, 2006).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The chapter describes the methodology of the current study. It includes participants, duration of the study, instruments, research procedures, data collection and analysis.

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were all seven Thai EFL first graders who were 7 years of age of Ban Hong-Kah School, Rasisalai District, Sisaket Province, Thailand. They were in the second semester of the academic year 2014. All of them could say the names of all the letters from A-Z, but did not know the sounds that each letter represents. When they had been at the Kindergarten level, English was not taught. Also, in their earlier study in the first semester, English letter sounds were not taught and word reading was presented using the whole language approach. Spelling was to facilitate the skill of English word reading, where students had to repeat each letter in a word. These subjects had never experienced phonics instruction previously.

3.2 Duration of the Study

The study lasted for two weeks. It included three study stages; pre-testing, phonics instruction, and post-testing. The stage of phonics instruction included seven periods (PPP teaching model lesson plans). Each individual phonics instruction period lasted for 60 minutes and the pre-testing and post-testing were placed separately at the initial and final stages of the study (see appendix A for lesson plans 1-7).

3.2.1 Instruction Plan

The detail of the instruction plan of the study can be seen in the table below.

Table1 Instruction Plan

Teaching Periods	Teaching Focus	Class Evaluation
Pre-test of Word Reading		
1 st Period	Vowel Letters and Sounds a /æ/, e /ɛ/	Sound Pronouncing
2 nd Period	Vowel Letters and Sounds a /æ/, e /ɛ/, i /ɪ/, o /ɔ/, u /ʊ/ /ɪ/	Sound Pronouncing
3 rd Period	Consonant Letters and Sounds /p/, /t/	Sound Pronouncing
4 th Period	Consonant Letters and Sounds /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/	Sound Pronouncing
5 th Period	a /æ/, e /ɛ/, i /ɪ/, o /ɔ/, u /ʊ/ /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/	Sound Pronouncing and blending
6 th Period	a /æ/, e /ɛ/, i /ɪ/, o /ɔ/, u /ʊ/ /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/	Sound Pronouncing and blending
7 th Period	a /æ/, e /ɛ/, i /ɪ/, o /ɔ/, u /ʊ/ /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/	Sound Pronouncing and blending
Post-test of Word Reading		

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Pre-test and Post-test

The evaluation of this study was processed by providing the same pre- and post-test made up of two word reading lists totaling 25 CVC words. The words contained in the pre- and post-test were not the same as the words used in the blending lists when teaching blending. The tested words were divided into two lists because young participants had short attention span. List 1 contained 13 items and list 2 contained 12 items (see appendix B for the items of pre- and post-test). All items on the two lists were a combination of the target letters with the same letter style (lower case) as used in the instruction process. Each target letter was set equally at the initial, middle and final positions among the 25 items. Each target consonant sound appeared equally in five initial and final positions (see appendix B for the pre- and post-tests 1, 2).

Table2 Number of target letters used among 25 tested words

Target letters	Initial	Middle	Final
a		5	
e		5	
i		5	
o		5	
u		5	
p	5		5
t	5		5
k	5		5
m	5		5
n	5		5



3.3.2 Letter Flashcards, Word Cards

To motivate and evaluate the learning of letter sounds, 10 letter flashcards and three word blending lists were used. The letter flashcards were used to present the ten target letter sounds, and were also included when fun phonics games (Crawl and Hit, Sound Collection, Sounds Shopping, Blending Competition and Sounds Shooting) were provided in this phonics instruction. The 10 letter flashcards were divided into five letters; p, t, k, m, and n which represent the five target consonant sounds, and five letters; a, e, i, o, and u which represent the five target vowel sounds. The three word blending lists (as seen below) were separately taught in three blending teaching lessons 5-7. The words used were not the same as the words used in the pre- and post-test lists.

Table 3 Blending Lists 1-3

Blending 1	Blending 2	Blending 3
tan	tit	mup
tem	pup	mok
pip	pen	nat
pok	kak	nem
kup	kem	tup
kim	mit	tat
mam	mok	pan
men	nun	pem
nit	nup	kin
nok	tok	kok

3.4 Research Procedures

There were three study stages as described below.

3.4.1 Pre-Testing

The study began with the pre-test in order to check students' abilities. Since the test was divided into two parts to reduce students' stress when facing too many items at one time, the first was held in the morning section and the second in the afternoon. Each student had to read aloud the words in the lists. The test was video recorded and the scores from this pre-test were compared with those of the post-test collected at the final stage of the study.

3.4.2 Phonics Instruction

The seven periods of phonics instruction were divided into two different teaching sections, letter sounds and letter sound blending instruction. For the first four periods, the instructor presented the target sounds to be learned with the use of letter flash cards and fun phonics games; Crawl and Hit, Sound Collection, Sounds Shopping, Blending Competition and Sounds Shooting (see appendix A for lesson plans 1-7). In order to support students' letter sound memorization, a repetition drill of target letter sounds was used in the process of learning.

During lessons 5 - 7, the instructor demonstrated how the target letter sounds could be blended into words. In this instructional process, letter flash cards and words blending lists were used to support teaching and learning. Chances to read different words made up of different target letter sounds were frequently provided. As in lessons 1 - 4, each student would read aloud and sound out each letter sound that they had learned in class to see whether each letter sound was pronounced and understood correctly. Also, the target words on each of the three word blending lists had to be read aloud correctly by each participant. When all students had completed these tasks, it was considered that the teaching of sounds and sound blending was complete.

3.4.3 Post-Testing

After the phonics instruction was completed, the post-test was taken by each individual learner. This activity was also video recorded. The results of the post-test were analyzed by comparing with the scores of the pre-test to measure the effectiveness of the phonics instruction.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The tests were completed orally by each individual student and scored by the teacher of the class who is also the researcher of the present study. The participants were tested to see if they could pronounce each sound and blend them into words correctly. The numerical data sets collected from the pre- and post-test were analyzed using the one sample t-test in order to understand how phonics instruction affected the students' simple English word reading ability and also to answer the first research question of the present study "Does phonics instruction help promote the reading of simple English words by Thai EFL 1st graders?". Each mark for a CVC word reading was given only if the participant could blend the three letter sounds into a word correctly. And each letter sound for each item was also marked 1-1-1 to distinguish which of the target letter sounds set for this study were found problematic (error number 18 and over out of 35) for learners to pronounce (see appendix C for the marking sheets) to answer the second research question "Are there letters that are problematic for the learners?".

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter 4 describes the result of the research based on the research questions stated in chapter 1. This is to compare the two comparative learning achievements of pre-test and post-test collected before and after the phonics instruction to find out whether there would be the simple word reading improvement after the instruction. In addition, letter sound pronouncing was also assessed to distinguish which target letter sounds placed in the study were found problematic for the students to pronounce.

4.1 Effectiveness of Phonics Instruction on Students' Simple Word Reading Skill

Table 4 below presents the results of the pre-testing and post-testing and the comparative results of the two tests to find out the simple English word reading improvement after the phonics instruction in class. The results answer the research question of “Does Phonics Instruction help promote the reading of simple English words by Thai EFL 1st graders?”.

Table 4 Pre-test / Post-test Scores of Words Reading

Students	Pre-Test (out of 25 items)	Post-Test (out of 25 items)	Gain
St1	0	6	6
St2	0	1	1
St3	0	8	8
St4	0	6	6
St5	0	0	0
St6	0	11	11
St7	0	1	1
Mean	0	4.71	4.71
SD	0	4.15	4.15
P			0.024

Level of .05 significant

Range: 0-11

From the comparative results presented in table 4, it can be concluded that after the phonics instruction, learners could reach the statistically higher score on their post-test ($M=4.71$) than their pre-test (0.00) at $p < 0.05$. The difference of the means of the pre-test and post-test is 4.71. According to the numerical data analyzed above, it could be summed up that there was a significant simple word reading improvement of 1st graders when phonics instruction was provided. However, if we look at the scores, we see that they are still very low.

4.2 Students' Problematic Letter Sounds

The table of post-testing letter sound errors below shows the findings of focused letters that were found problematic for students to pronounce during post-testing. The problematic letter sounds were distinguished at the three positions of initial, middle and final (for the pre-testing, the problematic letters were not distinguished because all

of the seven students could not read any words provided in the test lists). To distinguish the errors was to answer the second research question “Are there letters that are problematic for the learners?”. From the table, it can be concluded that the vowel letters seemed to be less problematic than the consonant letters. The only vowel letter that was found problematic for the learners to pronounce in this study was letter “e”. Its error number was 20 out of 35. Its unpronounced and mispronounced numbers were 9 and 11, respectively. For the initial consonant letters, all were found problematic for the students to pronounce either in the initial or final positions.

**Table 5 Numbers of Post-Testing Letter Sound Errors
(unpronounced and mispronounced letter sounds)**

Vowel Letter sounds	Vowel (35)		Unpronounced Letter sounds			Mispronounced Letter sounds		
a	9		4			5		
e	20		9			11		
i	13		7			6		
o	5		2			3		
u	17		12			5		
Total	64		34			30		

Consonant Letter sounds	Initial (35)	Final (35)	Total	Unpronounced Letter sounds			Mispronounced Letter sounds		
				Initial	final	total	Initial	final	Total
p	23	27	50	7	7	14	16	20	36
t	20	17	37	8	4	12	12	13	25
k	18	20	38	9	11	20	9	9	18
m	13	25	38	5	9	14	8	16	24
n	12	19	31	5	3	8	7	16	23
Total	86	108	194	34	34	68	52	74	126

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter includes the discussion of the study results that were presented in the previous chapter and the implications of the present study.

5.1 Discussion

This study had been conducted to search out the benefit of phonics instruction for first graders' simple English word reading. The study found that the phonics instruction appeared to help promote simple English word reading of the EFL 1st graders. It also met the other objective of finding the problematic letters for the learners to pronounce their sounds.

After 7 one-hour periods of phonics instruction, students reached the statistically higher marks of the post-test than on the pre-test. The students seemed to be able to make progress in simple English word reading, although the marks were still quite low. The students could make use of the knowledge taught to blend the combination of the letter sounds into words. When the learners recognized the letter sound of each letter at the three positions of initial consonant, middle short vowel, and final consonant sounds, they could blend the letter sounds into words correctly. Kajornboon (2010) pointed out that phonics instruction can improve students' pronunciation because the student could segment the sounds and produced them correctly. The finding of the present study supports Chall (1967), cited in Fredrick (2008), who stated that phonics instruction was effective to help children to become skilled readers and this study also agreed with the studies of Dahl et al. (1999), Kajornboon (2010), Mekwong (2004), Saising (2003), Sinsup (2009), Sturt (1999) who conducted the studies of the use of phonics instruction and found that the phonics instruction was effective to support the learning of reading and pronunciation.

In this study, if we look at the scores of the post-test, the instruction had a tendency to be useful as the result is still very low. The following reasons might be the causes of the low study result. Firstly, it could be due to the learning duration and the

number of learning periods. The duration may have been too short for the learners to memorize all the target letter sounds that were presented in the seven one-hour periods of this phonics instruction. Sinsup (2009) suggested that phonics instruction should be taught with the longer learning duration so that the learners can be more familiar with the letter sounds taught. According to Armbruster et al. (2003), when phonics instruction is employed, students need approximately two years to work with the instruction, and if phonics instruction begins early in first grade, the instruction should be completed by the end of second grade. Secondly, the low study result could be due to the learning materials and environment of this study. They were probably not interesting enough to motivate the students' learning and to support their learning of the letter sounds. Tomlinson (1998) recommended that to support phonics instruction, teaching materials should be varied in style, and mode, and rich in features of the target lesson. The letter and word flashcards used in this present study were printed only in black and white. The classroom had no other material that could support the learning such as the English letter chart or phonics books. Creative materials and learning environment that support the instructions should be used to help the students' memorization (Saising, 2003).

From the scoring tables, it could be seen that all letter sounds presented in the pre-test lists were unpronounced by all of the participants. The reason for not pronouncing may have been that the students lacked letter sound knowledge, since all of them had never been taught with the phonics instruction previously and had no letter knowledge. They had only the ability to say the names of the letters A-Z when they first involved in this present study. But for the post-test, most of the participants could pronounce at least some letter sounds provided in the word position of initial, middle, and final, even though not all target letter sounds of all 25 items were correctly pronounced. The students' simple English word reading improved but still not much and many letters were still pronounced incorrectly. For many items, only a sound or two were correctly pronounced.

From the scoring, it was found that consonant letters were more problematic than the vowel letters. This maybe because in English textbooks to which the students were exposed to, vowel letters are much less in number compared to the number of consonant letters (i.e, 5 versus 21). And the vowel letters are seen more frequently as

every word needs to have at least a vowel. The different error numbers might have also been caused by the different frequencies of the letter sound presentation that the instructor was not aware of when processing phonics instruction. Each letter of target letter sounds was presented quite unequally during the lessons without checking the students' understanding. Some letter sounds could have been presented more frequently and some were less. Some students might achieve the presented knowledge, while others might not. The more presented items may be remembered better than the less presented letters. In systematic phonic instructions, teacher should have the flashcards of target letters presented continually until all learners perfectly understand each target letter sounds (Tate, 1937). Repeated exposure can develop students' memorization (Armbruster et al., 2003). It is believed that if the learning duration and the number of learning period are extended, all letter sounds are equally presented, and the attractive material and learning environment are used and set, learners will have more time to learn the target letter sounds with great motivation to produce better learning outcomes.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical implications of this present study are that providing phonics instruction to the reading class of EFL first graders can help promote the simple English word reading skill. The instruction is recommended in the class of beginning readers. However, to provide the phonics instruction to help learners recognize the letter sounds, the duration of the instruction should be long enough for the learners to be familiar with all target letters and the sounds they represent. The students will have a better memorization of those letter sounds if they have enough time to practice. Also, teachers need to make sure that students can recognize all the letters and sounds represented by them before moving on to the blending. Moreover, the students should be taught using interesting learning materials and supporting environment so that the students can learn with more attention and motivation.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This chapter includes conclusion, limitations of the present study, and recommendations for further study.

6.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate whether phonics instruction would help promote the simple English word reading ability, and also to find out that after phonics instruction which of target letters would be problematic for 7 EFL first graders assigned to this study.

The first research question was answered by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores and the other research question of finding problematic letters was analyzed using scores collected during testing. The result showed the statistically higher scores of post-test than pre-test. However, if we look at the raw scores, we see that they are quite low (the mean gained score is only 4.71 out of 25). It can be concluded that phonics instruction seemed to help promote simple English word reading skill of participants of the present study. As for the problematic letter sounds for the students to pronounce, it was found that consonant letters on both onset and coda positions were more problematic than vowel ones.

6.2 Limitations of the study

There are some limitations of this study. Firstly, there were only seven one-hour periods of this phonics instruction that seemed not enough for the students to be familiar with the target letters and the sounds they represent. From the present study result, it can be seen that the students' simple English word reading ability did not improve much as expected. With the limitation of learning duration and learning periods, all the learners of this phonics instruction class could not fully understand the target letter sounds and this limited time might have caused the low learning outcome. With more learning periods or longer learning duration of phonics instruction, the

students may be more familiar with the target letter sounds and understand them better that they can achieve the better skill of letter sound pronunciation and can blend letter sounds into words more correctly. Secondly, there were only 10 letters (whose sounds are similar to Thai sounds) investigated in this study. In reality, there are 26 English letters which represent different sounds and not all are similar to the Thai sounds. It is still a question whether the study outcome will be the same if all 26 letters are presented to Thai EFL beginners. Lastly, there were only seven participants of this study. The number of the participants in this study is quite small. According to the result of the study, it may not be generalizable, and its effectiveness for a bigger group of learners is worth investigated.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Study

Due to the limitations of the study mentioned, the recommendations for further study are as follows.

Firstly, the learners need more time to understand each letter sound. Since the learners are Thai EFL 1st graders, it is not easy for them to learn to understand English letter sounds in short learning duration and a few learning periods. The learning duration needs to be extended when further studies are conducted.

Secondly, it concerns the small number of learners of this study. With the small group of learners who had the same background knowledge, phonics instruction appeared to be effective. However, the study result from this present study may not be generalized to the bigger group of learners with different background knowledge. The study to find the effectiveness of phonics instruction with a bigger group of learners with different background knowledge is recommended to see whether the phonics instruction remains useful.

Lastly, it is about the limited target letter sounds. All 26 letters are important for English word reading and they all are seen in textbooks. The other 16 English letters are worth investigated in further research to find out whether the phonics instruction also helps promote the simple English word reading of those letters.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
LESSON PLANS 1-7

Period 1

Title: Letter sounds /æ/ /ɛ/

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: To teach students the letter sounds /æ/ /ɛ/

Material: Letter flashcards a, e

Procedures:

Presentation:

The teacher asks the students to make a circle and warms up them with the “big and small circle” activity. And then the teacher presents the letters “a and e” and demonstrates them the sound that stands for each presented letter by pronouncing the sound of each letter.

Practice:

To practice the letter sounds, each student has to say out loud each letter sound when the teacher shows up each letter flashcard. The students also have to pass each letter flashcard to a friend on his or her side in a circle one by one with pronouncing the letter sound of each letter they are passing.

The teacher divides the students into two groups equally and lets the students to play the game “Crawl and Hit”. For the game, the letter flashcards are placed in the middle of the two groups and each group has to send one group member to play the game each time to crawl from the position to get the right letter flashcard according to the letter sound that the teacher produces.

Production:

To ensure that students achieve all two presented letter sounds. The teacher sticks the letter flashcards on the white board and has the students to pronounce the letter sound of each letter one student each time.

Period 2

Title: Letter sounds /æ/ /ɛ/ /ɪ/ /ɔ/ /ʌ/

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: To teach students the letter sounds /æ/ /ɛ/ /ɪ/ /ɔ/ /ʌ/

Material: Letter flashcards a, e, i, o, u

Procedures:

Presentation:

The teacher asks the students to make a circle and warms up them with “big and small circle” and “sit and stand” activities. And then the teacher presents the letters “a, e, i, o, u” and demonstrates them the sound that stands for each presented letter by pronouncing the sound of each letter repeatedly.

Practice:

To practice the letter sounds, each student has to say out loud each letter sound when the teacher shows up each letter flashcard. The students also have to pass each letter flashcard to a friend on his or her side in a circle one by one with pronouncing the letter sound of each letter they are passing.

The teacher gathers students into one group and has the students to play the game “sounds collecting”. For the game, all flashcards are showed up one by one and the student who raises the hand first will get the chance to pronounce the sound have one score written on the board to find the winner. Each letter will be showed up 4 times for the total score of 20.

Production:

As period 1, to ensure that students achieve all five presented letter sounds. The teacher sticks the letter flashcards on the white board and have the students to pronounce the letter sound of each letter one student each time.

Period 3

Title: Letter sounds /p/ /t/

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: To teach students the letter sounds /p/ /t/

Material: Letter flashcards p, t

Procedures:**Presentation:**

The teacher asks the students to make a circle and warms up them with the “big and small circle” activity. And then the teacher presents the letters “p, t” and demonstrates them the sound that stands for each of two presented letters by pronouncing the sound of each letter repeatedly.

Practice:

To practice the letter sounds, each student has to say out loud each letter sound when the teacher shows up each letter flashcard. After that the students also have to pass each letter flashcard to a friend on his or her side in a circle after finishing showing up and pronouncing the letter sound one by one.

The teacher gathers students into one group and has the students to play the game “sounds shooting”. For the game, students are grouped into two groups. The teacher puts the target letters on the board and each group has to send one player to shoot the target letter sound made by the teacher using a toy gun. The point will be given when the target letter is shot by the player of each group.

Production:

To ensure that students achieve all two presented letter sounds. The teacher sticks the letter flashcards on the white board and has the students to pronounce the letter sound of each letter one student at a time.

Period 4

Title: Letter sounds /p/ /t/ /k/ /m/ /n/

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: To teach students the letter sounds /p/ /t/ /k/ /m/ /n/

Material: Letter flashcards p t k m n

Procedures:**Presentation:**

The teacher asks the students to make a circle and warms up them with the “big and small circle” activity. And then the teacher presents the letters “p, t, k, m, n” and demonstrates them the sound that represents each of five presented letters by pronouncing the sound of each letter repeatedly and clearly.

Practice:

To practice the letter sounds, each student has to say out loud each letter sound when the teacher shows up each letter flashcard. After that the students also have to pass each letter flashcard to a friend on his or her side in a circle after finishing showing up and pronouncing the letter sound one by one.

The teacher groups students into two groups and has the students to play the game “sound shopping”. For the game, each group has the 10 banknotes of 10 baht. Each group has a chance to buy the presented letter 10 baht for each presented letter. The group gets the letter from the instructor only when the letter sound is correctly pronounced; otherwise, they lose their banknotes one for each time.

Production:

To ensure that students achieve all two presented letter sounds. The teacher sticks the target letter flashcards on the white board and has the students to pronounce the letter sound one student at a time.

Period 5**Title:** Letter sound blending 1**Time:** 60 minutes**Objective:** To teach students how to blend the letter sounds into words.**Material:** Letter flashcards a e i o u p t k m n

Word blending list 1

Procedures:**Presentation:**

The teacher groups all students at the front of the class and presents all letter sounds learned previously and has the students pronounce each letter sound together as the revision. The teacher will present how the letter sounds are blended in to words by demonstrating the blending to them using all target words from word blending list 1.

Practice:

To practice the letter sound blending, students play the game “blending competition”. The students are gathered in one group and the teacher puts the letters on the board three letters each time to make a word according to the target words on word blending list 1 word by word. Then the student will be asked to raise the hand and the first one will be allowed to blend the letter sounds showed on the board. He or she will get one score written on the board for each time of correct blending. The word on the list will be showed twice to reach the total score of 20. The winner is the one who has the top score.

Production:

To ensure that students can blend the letter sounds into word correctly, the teacher sticks word blending list 1 on the board and has the students to pronounce all words on the list one student at a time.

Period 6

Title: Letter sound blending 2

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: To teach students how to blend the letter sounds into a word.

Material: Letter flashcards a e i o u p t k m n
Word blending list 2

Procedures:

Presentation:

The teacher groups all students at the front of the class and present all letter sounds learned previously and have the students pronounce each letter sound together as the revision. The teacher will present how the letter sounds are blended in to words by demonstrating the blending to them using all target words from word blending list 2.

Practice:

To practice the letter sound blending, students do the letter sound blending together. The teacher will put the letters in order according to the word in the blending list 2 and has all students to blend the letter sounds in each chunk seen on the board into a word. The process will be continued chunk by chunk until all ten words are correctly blended by the students.

Production:

To ensure that students can blend the letter sounds into a word correctly, the teacher sticks word blending list 2 on the board and has the students to pronounce all words on the list one student at a time.

Period 7**Title:** Letter sound blending 3**Time:** 60 minutes**Objective:** To teach students how to blend the letter sounds into words.**Material:** Letter flashcards a e i o u p t k m n
Word blending list 3**Procedures:****Presentation:**

The teacher groups all students at the front of the class and present all letter sounds learned previously and has the students to pronounce each letter sound together as the revision. The teacher will present how the letter sounds are blended in to words by demonstrating the blending to them using all target words from word blending list 3.

Practice:

To practice the letter sound blending, students play the game “blending competition”. The students are gathered in one group and the teacher puts the letters on the board three letters each time to make a word according to the target words on word blending list 3 word by word. Then the student will be asked to raise the hand and the first one will be allowed to blend the letter sounds showed on the board. He or she will get one score written on the board for each time of correct blending. The word on the list will be showed twice to reach the total score of 20. The winner is the one who has the top score.

Production:

To ensure that students can blend the letter sounds into word correctly, the teacher sticks word blending list 3 on the board and has the students to pronounce all words on the list each individual student one by one.

APPENDIX B
PRE - AND POST - TESTS 1, 2

Pre-test / Post-test 1

kum
man
non
puk
tot
kip
mem
nan
pit
tap
kek
num
mot

Pre-test / Post-test 2

pam
ten
kit
mop
nuk
pot
tum
kan
mek
nip
pek
tip

APPENDIX C
MARKING SHEETS

**Numbers of Sound Correction and Unpronounced Letter Sounds
of Pre- and Post – Test 1,2**

Numbers of Sound Correction

Numbers of Sound Correction											
Pre-Test						Post-Test					
Initial (5)		Middle(5)		Final(5)		Initial(5)		Middle(5)		Final(5)	
p		a		p		p		a		p	
t		e		t		t		e		t	
k		i		k		k		i		k	
m		o		m		m		o		m	
n		u		n		n		u		n	

Numbers of Unpronounced Letter Sounds

Numbers of Unpronounced Letter Sounds											
Pre-Test						Post-Test					
Initial (5)		Middle(5)		Final(5)		Initial(5)		Middle(5)		Final(5)	
p		a		p		p		a		p	
t		e		t		t		e		t	
k		i		k		k		i		k	
m		o		m		m		o		m	
n		u		n		n		u		n	

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